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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LILONGWE 000630

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ODIP](#) [EAID](#) [KPKO](#) [MI](#)  
SUBJECT: MALAWI: AMB. BODDE PRESENTS CREDENTIALS TO PRES.  
MUTHARIKA

REF: LILONGWE 612

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Classified By: Ambassador Peter Bodde for Reasons 1.4 b, d

¶1. (U) Summary: On October 28, Ambassador Peter Bodde presented his letter of credence to President Bingu wa Mutharika at the State House. Ambassador Bodde previously presented a copy of his credentials to Foreign Minister Joyce Banda on October 16 (reftel). During a lengthy private discussion, Mutharika stressed his appreciation for U.S. assistance with HIV, malaria, and education and asked for continued support in these areas. The President also described his vision of a "green belt" along Lake Malawi as a potential solution to ensure Malawi's food security for the foreseeable future. Mutharika stressed his ambition to improve girls' education in Malawi and asked for increased U.S. support for his initiatives. He reiterated Malawi's desire to expand its role as an international peacekeeper and asked for U.S. equipment support to help make that happen. Finally, Mutharika said he was determined to hold free and fair elections next May and he invited international observers to come to Malawi at least three months earlier so they could be effective. End summary.

¶2. (U) On October 28, Ambassador Peter W. Bodde presented his letter of credence to President Bingu wa Mutharika. The Ambassador was accompanied by his wife and the Deputy Chief of Mission. Chief Secretary of the Office of President and Cabinet Bright Msaka (Chief of Staff equivalent) also attended the ceremony. Amb. Bodde was one of five new ambassadors who presented credentials during the day, but President Mutharika was generous with his time, spending over thirty minutes in a private one-on-one discussion.

Strong Bilateral Relationship  
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¶3. (C) During the private conversation, Mutharika described Malawi's bilateral relationship with the United States as strong. He said that the government of Malawi actively supported U.S. positions when it could, citing the GOM's support of the U.S. position on the International Court of Justice. Mutharika also expressed his personal gratitude for U.S. assistance. He highlighted the areas of education, HIV/AIDS, and malaria as critical areas that the United States is providing key assistance that will benefit Malawi's

future. Mutharika said he remained especially concerned about tuberculosis and malaria in Malawi. Amb. Bodde described the expanding efforts under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) to combat these diseases and noted that the U.S. government was looking to do more.

#### Green Belt

¶4. (C) Mutharika spent almost 10 minutes of the discussion describing his plans to create a "green belt" in Malawi. The President's vision is to create a 15-30 kilometer area of intensive irrigation along the entire shore of Lake Malawi and the Shire River. Mutharika said that despite Malawi's current dependence on rain-fed agriculture, the country possessed good water resources. The green belt, he said, would allow Malawi to maximize them. He described a plan to grow non-traditional crops such as rice and cassava in the green belt, as well as establishing large-scale fish farms. Mutharika believes growing non-traditional crops will allow Malawi to build its agricultural exports to its neighbors. However, he believed his countrymen would continue to prefer Malawi's staple crop maize to products easily grown in the green belt.

¶5. (C) The President also envisions building eight new dams to provide both irrigation and power production, both keys to ensuring food security and elimination of electricity shortfalls that disrupt industry. He emotionally described the continued need for large-scale infrastructure projects such as these to secure sustained economic growth for Malawi. Mutharika said he will personally lead the diplomatic corp on a tour of the green belt areas to describe his vision, and

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asked for U.S. assistance to help make it reality.

#### Education

¶6. (C) Mutharika made a special pitch for increased U.S. assistance in the field of education. He said curriculum reform, teacher training, and a focused effort to provide education to girls and young women were key for improving Malawi's educational system. Mutharika proudly described his personal efforts to create hostels and boarding facilities for girls at government schools so they would have more opportunities to finish their education. He said that the current social conditions in Malawi made it extremely difficult for a girl to finish secondary school. Harassment from male students and others often forced girls out of the system.

¶7. (C) Mutharika's hope is to create safe and positive environments for girls seeking education. He said more educated women in Malawi would create conditions for social change, even at the village level. Amb. Bodde commented that the U.S. was deeply engaged in the education sector through both USAID and the Peace Corp, but he added that he would see what additional assistance might be possible in the sector.

#### Defense Assistance

¶8. (C) Mutharika made a specific request for military equipment and training to enable a battalion to deploy to a U.N. peacekeeping operation. He described Malawi's disappointment over a July U.N. decision not to accept Malawi's offer to supply an infantry battalion to the mission in Darfur, but indicated Malawi still wanted to expand its role in peacekeeping missions. He emphasized that it was only the Malawi Defense Force's (MDF) lack of equipment that prevented UN acceptance of the Malawian unit for Darfur. As an example, Mutharika said the GOM purchased armored personnel carriers (APC) only to be told by the U.N. the

vehicles were not the right kind. (Comment: Taiwan supplied the money for the APCs and the U.N. actually told the MDF the vehicles were acceptable, but the MDF could not deploy with a mixed fleet of vehicles augmented by older Israeli-model APCs due to training and maintenance concerns. End Comment.) He stressed the MDF's equipment needs were still great, ranging from canteens to sophisticated equipment, but the desire to help was strong as well. Mutharika said he was extremely proud of the Malawian company currently deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, adding that despite being routinely challenged by locals, the MDF refrained from armed responses against civilians.

¶9. (C) Comment: While Mutharika's offer is encouraging, recent USG efforts to engage the MDF and GOM on peacekeeping have been frustrating, and have had mixed results. Post will use this renewed offer to encourage further action by the MDF. In reality, the MDF needs more than just equipment to be ready for a deployment. At a minimum, theater-focused peace support training from ACOTA or another training program for at least one battalion would be required. Training for logistics and technical support personnel would also be beneficial. Post will continue to engage the MDF to set a firm date to start ACOTA training as soon as possible. End Comment.

#### 2009 Elections

¶10. (C) The President stressed that he was determined to hold free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections next May. He said he remained concerned about the potential for pre- and post-election violence, but would do everything in his power to ensure violence would not happen. Mutharika noted that Malawi has a constitutional requirement for an informed electorate, and that he planned to personally see that all parties' platforms were well known to the populace. He commented that leaders should be elected based on platforms and past performance, and not personality alone. Mutharika smiled as he said that he ran for president to

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serve his nation, and not to gain wealth. He emphatically stated that if he loses the election, he will return to private life at his farm and "fight with his cows" instead of the opposition.

¶11. (C) Mutharika said he felt it was critical for international observers to be engaged in the electoral process in Malawi. He made a specific point that observers should be in Malawi at least two or three months before the elections. While he said all observers are welcome, he believed international observers who arrived only for the polling day would be of little utility.

#### Desire for Continued Engagement

¶12. (C) Amb. Bodde responded to the issues that Mutharika raised by noting that while he was new to Africa, he would apply relevant experiences from other parts of the world to the issues Malawi faces. He agreed that the U.S. and Malawi should remain closely engaged, and said he would look for possibilities to expand our cooperation. Mutharika said he felt the mark of a good ambassador was how much progress Malawi made during the ambassador's tenure. He said he looked forward to many more meetings with Amb. Bodde, and that Amb. Bodde could contact him directly at any time through his staff.

13 (C) Comment: Despite having numerous credential ceremonies, Mutharika was generous with his time and well-briefed on areas of Malawi-U.S. engagement. Post will follow-up on the issues raised by Mutharika in the meeting and will use the issuance of the new MCC scorecard as an occasion to seek another meeting to brief the President.

